Conference on Effectively Restoring Ecosystems
22-24 August 2000, St. Louis, Missouri

BACKGROUND

Session: Plenary 2
Topic: Innovations in the Continuing Authorities Program
Moderators:

- Les Tong, CESPD
- Dennis Barnett, CESAD

Recorder: Larry Ives, CENAO
Panelists:

- Chris Gilmore, CELMN
- Guy Brown, CESPK
- Bill Hubbard, CENAE
- George Strain, CESAJ

Objective: To identify and exchange information on innovative approaches to Section 1135, 204 and 206 projects and programs.
Description: The session was presented in two parts. Part one was presented Tuesday morning and involved a panel of volunteers who provided brief descriptions of their respective innovative activities. Using the wealth of talent and fertile minds in attendance, a large group exercise followed. Part two as a report back of the large group exercise, presented on Thursday afternoon.

HIGHLIGHTS

Panel Presentations

Bill Hubbard, CENAE

Mr. Hubbard discussed organizational innovations. He described how NED shopped for projects and provided a description of results by States. In Connecticut, Section 22 funds have been used to finds jobs; to look at the infrastructure partnership. They have evaluated areas around highways and railroads, used restoration as a form of preservation and partnered with NOAA for funds. In Massachusetts, they have a wetland mitigation and restoration program, have used aerials for identification, of salt marshes particularly, and participated in Corporate America Funding. In Maine they have worked mostly in tidal marshes. There are no environmental organizations with funds to cost share. DOT in Maine came to the rescue with a partnering agreement.

Chris Gilmore, CELMN

Mr. Gilmore's presentation focussed on technical considerations. He presented Louisiana coast initiatives for which Section 204 was used. In the aftermath of Hurricane Georges, they capitalized on the availability of an enormous amount of dredged material. In February, 1999, they brought all the stakeholders together, developed a plan of action

for island restoration and obtained environmental clearances. Phase I of the restoration was completed within one year of Hurricane Georges. In addition, a new timeline for Section 204 projects was developed, reducing the 12 to 16 month process to a 6 to 12 month process. Mr. Gilmore commented that getting the partnership aspect in place was key to their success. Through this, the District has developed an invaluable working relationship and trust among Federal and State agencies.

Guy Brown, CESPK

Mr. Brown focused on the business process. CESPK has a dedicated Continuing Authorities Program Project Delivery Team (CAP PDT). They have a charter and have established business processes. There are regular team meetings, monthly meetings with the District Engineer and a process for sharing information with team customers. They are developing PROMIS and MS Project templates, starting with the Sections 206/1135 template. The Prospect Island project will have the first complete and accurate PROMIS/Microsoft Project schedule. It will then be used to enter and update each SPK CAP project in or going to construction in FY2000. Subsequent entries will include all projects in the ERR phase (Secs 206 & 1135), then those in the DPR phase (205s) phase, then those in the PDA phase (Sec 14s and 208s) and finally those in the PRP phase (Sec 206 and 1135s).

George Strain, CESAJ

The focus of Mr. Strain's presentation was partnership and sponsorship. He emphasized common sense approaches to partnering and project coordination. He discussed early coordination with the State agency responsible for water quality certification, early execution of the PCA, sponsor preparation of plans and specifications, design/construct using local expertise and including physically handicapped facilities in the restoration project. Mr. Strain also proposed that USACE use the PRP as a decision document in cases where the sponsor already has a Corps permit with appropriate NEPA compliance, other alternatives are not obvious, and plans and specs are at 80% or near completion. This would provide a good basis for a cost estimate. Several attendees to the conference commented favorably on this idea during the conference.

Large Group Exercise

Les Tong, CESPD, facilitated the large group exercise. Conference attendees were given index cards and asked to write down their ideas of innovative CAP Ecosystem Restoration; excluding anything that has to do with funding. The top three ideas were posted on charts. All cards were collected. The submitted ideas have been categorized as follows:

Authority

- Make CAP the District Engineer's Program.
- Project Approval at Division level instead of HQ.

- Place responsibility for ecosystem restoration reports/documents on environmental planning
- Give grants for very small projects; up to 10% of total program.
- Give grants for small projects burdened by costs for USACE planning and engineering.
- Use Section 206/1135 authorities for abandoned mine restoration

Partnerships

- Bring together regional agency heads to ensure program integration
- Check your EGO at the door with Agencies, Stakeholders, LCSS, PDT
- Design "charettes" with full agency, tribal involvement
- Develop more sophisticated partners
- Early involvement of all stakeholders
- More flexile definition of “Sponsor”. (Less Government organizations)
- Use of non-traditional sponsors - Corporate and foundation
- Use of partnerships to extend and develop more comprehensive solutions to restoration needs
- Use of Regional Resource Agencies

Interdisciplinary Teams

- Be able to pick and choose team members
- Bring in outside experts early (EEDC, WES, CERC, CERL, TEC)
- Build an Environmental (Ecosystem) Restoration Focus Team (ERFT) at the District level (especially in those Districts with a developing Environmental Mission) that would bring together a multidisciplinary team comprised of a representative from the appropriate technical/non-technical branches/sections
- Dedicated CAP team, separate from GI
- Dedicated CAP/Env teams
- Dedicated small projects team
- Empower CAP team resolve to do jobs regardless of functional organization
- Eliminate multiple distractions of team members
- Facilitate improved technical inter-disciplinary communication, coordination, problem solving, plan form, and team building
- Greater us of multi-disciplinary teams
- IPA’s
- PM shouldn’t be the only engineer, use all disciplines
- Self Contained CAP Teams
- Sharing information within multi-disciplinary teams via an Intranet
- Small project teams - dedicated. Using BLM road crews for construction
- Team dedicated to working on CAP only
- Use of local academia/students
- Use of volunteers
- Use the Project Delivery Team (PDT) concept for CAP from project start to finish

Contracting

- Use 8A contractors.
- Contract out entire feasibility or PRP.
- Pick and choose good projects.
- Contract out entire CAP Studies in lieu of using in-house personnel.
- Use ID/IQ contracting, sponsor contracting out for in-kind.

Study Scope

- Eliminate big reports, downscale expectations of report requirements (up to 10% of total CAP budget).
- Minimize plan formulation, but do more brainstorming.
- Use NEPA document as report.
- Do not over design in feasibility phase, save details for Plans and Specifications.
- Use design plans and specs developed by sponsor in lieu of new ones for restoration projects.
- Re-use models from similar projects in same areas, tailor for each project.
- Reduce data calls, reduce project documentation to what is needed for project.
- Include more innovative features in Urban Restoration Projects

Formulation/Evaluation

- Environmental Tools and Technology Workshops for Districts to become familiar with tools for ecosystem restoration
- Establish ecological value ranking systems
- Use EXHEP software
- Science based adaptive management, including adaptive environmental assessment (AEA), modeling for study and project formulation
- Include monitoring as a project output
- Include more recreation in environmental restoration

Real Estate Issues

- "Standardized" easement for restoration
- Allow conservation as an objective along with preservation, prevention
- Begin Rights of Entry for surveys and exploration early in feasibility phase
- Build using other Agency Real Estate interests
- Easier Real Estate requirements
- Real Estate easement - delegate more to District Real Estate

Environmental Compliance

- Allow study to proceed while concluding ESA/Env Compliance
- Define minimum standard/criteria for CAP projects ie: NEPA, public involvement, engineering constraints, quantification of environmental benefits impact assessment
- Develop check list for NEPA documentation for small restoration projects. Reduce time and costs

- Streamline NEPA compliance

Coordination and Review

- Develop an approach for conducting repeat 204 projects streamlined between Division and District.
- Strictly enforce Division Review timeframes.
- Maximum 30-day review by Division on all restoration documents.
- Skip approval of P&S.
- Skip 2nd and 3rd levels of QC/QA in-house.
- Provide waivers, even if only as trial basis, on regulations; i.e., using PRP as decision document.
- Conduct monthly programmatic meetings.

Project Cooperation Agreements (PCAs)

- "Program" Cooperative Agreements
- Execute PCA early
- PCA requirements need revision for environmental projects
- Re-do PCA requirements
- Standard PCA for feasibility phase credit
- Allow innovative sponsor in-kind credits (conservation easements)
- Allow Sponsors to perform in-kind without PCA's

Implementation Issues

- Use design/build
- Design/planning concentrated meetings to finish conceptual design of alternatives CEA/ICA, alternative selection in a brief timeframe (month?).
- Implement design/construct on CAP projects
- Use PRP's as the final design document for projects having Corps Regulatory 404 and/or Section 10 permits

Outreach

- Define and facilitate the District's ER short and long term goals and objectives with regard to the Environmental Mission
- Develop integrated plan to educate congress regarding CAP. I.e. HQ will establish relationships with Appropriations Committee. Division will deal with regional issues. Districts will establish relationships with individual Congressmen
- Highlight incorporation of the Environmental Mission objectives into traditional USACE projects and programs (FC and O&M)
- Lend "visibility" to ER aspect of District's Environmental Mission
- Lessons Learned Recaps
- Rotate folks out of HQ and Divisions into Field to re-learn importance of customer relations